

**Treating the Emperors in the Qing Palace:
The tension between the Manchu rulers' public power and
private frailty**

by

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A Thesis in International Studies

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Abstract

This thesis examines the medical case records of the Imperial Qing Palace. The case records were examined with a view to see how Chinese medicine was practised in the Qing period in China. I also analysed the role of medical cases as another way of adding to an understanding of history.

My primary sources were the archive medical case records of the Qing Imperial Palace as compiled by Chen Keji. I also used selected secondary sources, particularly research by Chang Che-Chia on the Qing cases.

I concentrated my research on selected emperors and the Empress Dowager. I analysed the case records of Kangxi, Qianlong, Tongzhi, Guangxu and Cixi. Each of these figures were analysed using medical analysis and historical analysis. Using clinical knowledge, I analysed each of these political figures considering the historical and social context of the time.

While analysing selected cases I also analysed the medical approach and style of one doctor of the nineteenth century, Ma Peizhi. This physician was selected as representative of elite doctors in China in the late Qing period. Using the methodology of textual analysis I supplemented analysis of the primary sources with examination of secondary sources such as biographies and other journals.

In medical terms, I found that the practice of Chinese medicine changes according to social and historical circumstances. In line with the social norms of the elite at the time in Qing China, medicine was practised with the approach of gentleness and balance. This distinctive style, practised by Ma Peizhi, saw the root of physical disease in mental unease.

In historical terms, I found that the medical records provided primary evidence for trends in Qing history. The Kangxi emperor looked askance at Chinese medicine, while avidly practising his Manchu shamanic rituals. His grandson, Qianlong, in contrast, presented himself as a patron of Chinese classical learning, of which he saw Chinese medicine as an important component. This was evidence that the sinification of the Manchu conquerors was almost complete.

A key finding of the thesis was that the realities of the Qing emperors and the Empress Dowager Cixi differed from the personas they had projected to the public. The Qing emperors and the Empress Dowager were, on the whole, frail in health, psychologically vulnerable and suffering from chronic anxiety, if not depression.

The Qing images of power did not fit the reality.